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TELEGRAM

April 13, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 1754 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: ELAB, PREL, PHUM, PGOV, SOCI, CVIS
Captions: None
Subject: LABOR ATTACHES PAINT A RELATIVELY ROSY PICTURE OF LOCAL
LABOR CONDITIONS
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 01754

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: ECON
INFO: P/M AMB DCM POL
Laser1:
INFO: FCS

DISSEMINATION: ECON
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM: RAALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: ECON: GARANA
CLEARED: ECON: TEWILLIAMS

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9379
RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC
RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 0497
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1037
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0180
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0083
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 0480

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001754

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/RA, DRL AND EB/CBA
STATE PASS OPIC/OPIC INTERNATIONAL POLICY DEPARTMENT
FOR VIRGINIA GREEN AND HARVEY HAMBURG
AMEMBASSY TUNIS HOLD FOR FSI: OLIVER JOHN
USDOC FOR 4530/ITA/MAC/ONE/DGUGLIELMI,
4520/ITA/MAC/ONE/CLOUSTAUNAU,
4500/ITA/MAC/DAS/WILLIAMSON,
3131/CS/OIO/ANESA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [CVIS](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: LABOR ATTACHES PAINT A RELATIVELY ROSY

PICTURE OF LOCAL LABOR CONDITIONS

REF: A) ABU DHABI 941

- B) ABU DHABI 1090
- C) ABU DHABI 1204
- D) ABU DHABI 1240

¶11. (SBU) Summary and comment: In conversations with the Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Filipino Labor Attaches, Econoff was repeatedly told that the vast majority of labor disputes in the UAE between foreign nationals and Emirati businesses and institutions are generally handled on an informal level with the assistance of the various embassies. When informal processes fail, the embassies guide workers to formal government channels for dispute resolution. According to the Labor Attaches, existing formal and informal mechanisms result in most labor disputes involving foreign nationals in the UAE being settled amicably.

¶12. (SBU) Summary and comment (con't): The Labor Attaches have a vested interest in painting a rosy scenario to make themselves look good. Their anecdotes of diligent efforts and successes on behalf of their clients reflect admirably on themselves. All of these embassies also desire to promote a continuing inflow of laborers from their native lands, to help ease unemployment back home, and to generate needed foreign exchange. Thus they have a tendency to emphasize the good and minimize the bad in regards to labor disputes. While, the administrative and legal processes may be relatively fair, they are also extremely time-consuming and difficult. Most workers have neither the time, nor patience for such protracted proceedings. Nonetheless, even with these caveats, the consistency of the Labor Attaches' upbeat assessments of the dispute resolution processes demonstrates that the informal grievance system does appear to work relatively well -- when a matter is brought to the attention of the Labor Attaches. The UAEG is also in the process of enacting legislation that will institutionalize workers' rights and bring the formal system closer in line to international standards. (See refs A-D). End summary and comment.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF LABOR IN THE UAE

¶13. (U) The UAE economy is highly dependent on foreign skilled and unskilled workers. More than 80 percent of the estimated population of 3.9 million is expatriate, and approximately 63 percent of the total population is non-Arab Asian. Only about 10 percent of the workforce is Emirati, a number that decreases to only 2 percent in the private sector. The vast majority of unskilled laborers in the UAE come from five countries: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

INFORMAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

¶14. (U) Laborers most commonly complained of poor working conditions and not receiving wages, and expatriate domestic servants complained of abuse. Workers are protected by a comprehensive UAE Labor Law that regulates all facets of labor relations. (Note: This law does not cover domestic servants. Laborers do not technically have the right to strike, but work stoppages/strikes are not uncommon in the UAE and the federal government is in the process of formalizing legislation to institutionalize unions. End note.) In January 2003, a new law was enacted requiring sponsors and domestic servants to adhere to a contract system, specifying the rights and duties of each party to the other. Under this legislation, sponsors will be under the same obligations as other employers, and domestic

servants will have the right to complain to the Labour Disputes Section of the Ministry of Labour.

¶15. (SBU) According to the Labor Attaches, workplace disputes are generally resolved directly between the employee and the employer. (Note: This is also the first recommended course of action in the UAE Labor Law. End Note.) If troubles persist, laborers will ask their embassy for assistance. (Note: Due to the large Filipino population in the UAE, the Philippines Embassy and Consulate receive 200-250 calls or walk-ins per week. The Sri Lankans reported about 150 cases weekly, the Bangladeshis about 100/weekly and the Indians could not provide an estimate. End note.) Once the worker reports an incident, the Labor Attaché contacts the employer on behalf of the worker and tries to resolve the situation amicably. In a recent example, food workers at the UAE University in Al Ain complained to the Philippines Embassy that they had not been paid. The Labor Attaché in turn contacted university officials and learned the federal government had not properly disbursed the funds for salaries. She then called the appropriate individuals in the government and resolved the situation. The Labor Attaché stated that this anecdote was typical of how labor disputes are traditionally handled in the UAE.

FORMAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

¶16. (SBU) When informal methods fail to resolve labor problems, the UAE Labor Law does provide for administrative and legal relief. Generally, a case is first filed with the Labor Disputes Section of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and then, as a last resort, brought before the civil courts. (Note: Though the Philippines Embassy gets a large number of calls and walk-ins, the Labor Attaché estimated that there are only about 20 cases presently in the legal system). Outside of the Philippines Embassy, none of the Labor Attachés had an accurate count of the cases before the administrative and legal systems. They all agreed, however, that even though the process took some time, it was generally fair and the court system in particular was extremely competent.

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